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DO 501 Basic Christian Doctrine

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Basic Christian Doctrine DO 501

Dr. Ron Creasman, Professor
Extended Learning 1)On Line Course
Spring 2003

(Notice: This is a draft copy. The official syllabus will be available 2/1/03)

Welcome! The course DO 501 is Asbury's introductory class to basic Christian doctrines and I look forward to working with each of you as we explore the fundamental beliefs of our Christian faith. I hope that you will gain a thoughtful understanding of what we believe as well as the as an appreciation of the importance of correct doctrine for your personal life and your ministry. Many of you may be wondering what difference theology makes in the practice of ministry. I assure you, theology is of critical significance to the manner in which we carry out our vocation, whatever our particular calling may be.

Take for instance the topic of divine providence. This doctrine has profound implications for the way we minister to those whose lives have been touched by tragedy. In many other ways, what we believe about God, humans and creation determines the form and content of our ministry. Moreover, it is unfortunately true that false ideas gradually influence our thinking, to the place where we find ourselves thinking and behaving in ways that do not accurately reflect the truths of Christianity. This pertains to areas as diverse as the way we worship to the way we recreate.

Although this class is about doctrine, it is not about doctrinal hairsplitting disputes. Rather, the majority of our attention will focus on the grand truths of Christian tradition. These truths are those contained in the classical creeds that have been preserved through the centuries. But don't be misled into thinking that because these doctrines are basic, they are simplistic. You will be asked to do some very hard thinking about the mysteries of our faith. At times you may find yourself challenged and even perplexed.

What else could be expected from trying to understand, for example, the mystery of a Savior who is at the same time fully God and completely human? Or what about trying to grapple with the nature of original sin? While a complete understanding of such doctrines is beyond us, it is certainly worthwhile to wrestle with the complexities of the issues, for they are essential to what we believe, and in fact strongly influence the way we minister. I hope you will be open to new ways of thinking as we embark on this journey together. Be open and honest about how you are doing. Your classmates and I are here to help.

Let's each of us prepare to allow the Spirit of God to lead us into deeper understanding of who God is so that we might more fully experience God's for us personally and so that we might be better ministers of that love to others.

PURPOSE / DESCRIPTION

This is an introductory course that bases the theological formation of students upon biblical data as well as upon the classical Christian tradition, contemporary theology, and Wesleyan theological distinctives with a view to helping students grasp the importance of theology for the practice of ministry.

OBJECTIVES: By the end of the course students will:

1. Have developed a working theological vocabulary that will support further study in theology and related disciplines.
2. Have grasped the vital connection between theology and the Christian life and theology and the practice of ministry.
3. Have been introduced to all the major areas in the study of Christian theology.
4. Be able to articulate the distinctive doctrinal emphases of Asbury Theological Seminary
5. Be able to reflect theologically upon the practice of ministry.
6. Have developed a love for God's truth and cultivated a sense of appreciation for God's personal self-introduction in the biblical history of salvation.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1.General Class Participation (20%) Because this obviously cannot be a lecture type course, the format of the course will center around online discussions of the assigned weekly readings. Each student will be expected to post responses to discussion prompts and to respond to at least two responses of others. These responses are to be thoughtful yet concise (e.g. 50-70 words per posting)

2.Doctrine in Ministry Scenarios (30%) Approximately every other week, a written assignment will be given requiring the student to apply the topics covered to a real life ministry situation. These papers will be brief, typically 2 pages double spaced. For specific assignments see the schedule below.

3.Annotation of one of the Creeds (25%) Each student will provide an annotation of one of five Creeds, to be assigned during the course. The purpose of the annotation is to clarify and explain the different truth claims made by the Creed. In addition to the annotation, a defense of the truth claims made by the Creed will be provided. The purpose of the defense is to answer one question for the non-believer: what warrants belief in these doctrinal claims? This exercise is to be not less than eight nor more than twelve pages in length, double spaced.

4. Sermon or Church School Lesson on Doctrine (25%). Each student will write either a sermon or prepare a Church School lesson which aims to educate parishioners on the importance of doctrine in general and of the truthfulness of one particular doctrine. I will oversee the selection of which doctrine, you will decide upon sermon or Church School lesson based upon your ministry plans. This sermon or Church School lesson is to be not less than four nor more than eight pages in length

SCHEDULE / OUTLINE

Week 1 Opening introductions. Sources and nature of doctrine. Two definitions of faith. Read Gonzalez 9-31 and Lawson 1-10. Selected biblical passages

Week 2 The Doctrine of Revelation. Natural vs. Special revelation. The Word of God. Various theories of biblical inspiration. Read Gonzalez 33-43

Week 3 The Doctrine of God. God's nature and attributes. Arguments for God's existence. The triune God. Trans-sexuality of God. Read Gonzalez 43-47 and Lawson 10-25, 119-125. Selected biblical passages.

Week 4 The doctrine of creation. Divine providence: God's activity in creation. Miracles and Angels. Read Gonzalez 55-64; 73-76 and Lawson 25-33.

Week 5 The doctrine of Christ: His person. Incarnation. Virgin Birth. Truly God and Truly Man. Christological debates and heresies. Read Gonzalez 77-83 and Lawson 33-65 and selected biblical passages

Week 6 The doctrine of Christ: His work. The Cross. Theories of Atonement. The nature of salvation. Read Gonzalez 83-97 and Lawson 65-66; 79-96

Week 7 The doctrine of Evil. Sinful human nature. The origin of sin. The devil. Theodicy. Read Gonzalez 64-73 and Lawson 66-79

Week 8 The doctrine of Christ's Resurrection. The meaning of Christ's Resurrection. Evidences for the Resurrection. The perpetual humanity of Christ. Read Lawson 96-108.

Week 9 The doctrine of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament.. The Spirit's role in salvation. Pentecost and the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Read Lawson 111-119.

Week 10 The doctrine of the Church. Earthly and spiritual versions. Community of Believers. Body of Christ. Agency of Christ's work in this world. Read Gonzalez 97-119 and Lawson 126-125.

Week 11 The doctrine of worship. Sacraments. Baptism. Eucharist. Read Gonzalez 119-139 and Lawson 155-183

Week 13 The doctrine of afterlife. The return of Christ. The significance of death. Judgment. Hell. The general resurrection. The new heaven and the new earth. Read Gonzalez 139-159 and Lawson 236-270.

Week 14 Various concluding topics. Asbury Wesleyan distinctives. Assurance of faith. Sanctification. Christian Doctrine in the context of Postmodernism. Selected readings

DOCTRINE IN MINISTRY SCENARIOS (Writing Assignments)

{Many of these I have borrowed from my colleague Dr Steven Seamands}

WEEKS 2 and 3

In the light of what you have learned, write a prayer of adoration (one which centers upon who God is) which focuses upon God's omnipresence, omnipotence, and omniscience, but most of all on God's love. Assume that you will be using the prayer in a worship service where you have been asked to pray. DON'T move to other elements of prayer such as confession or petition, STAY with adoration. (1 page double-spaced).

WEEK 4

You are visiting with Mary and John Smith, an unchurched couple in your community whom you have gotten to know quite well. A year ago, their teenage son, Mark, was seriously injured in a football game. As a result he is paralyzed from the waist down and confined to a wheel chair. Because John's parents were active members in your church, you got to know them after the accident. In fact, you visited with them many times during the first few months after the accident and have helped them work through their emotional pain.

Now things have settled down and they seem to be making the best of the situation. But during the course of this particular visit they begin to voice their questions about God. John expresses it like this: "I just don't understand it. How could a god who is loving and all-powerful, let something like this happen? Why didn't God intervene? It makes me wonder if God really cares the way you say He does and if he really is in charge after all. I want to believe, but I just can't make sense of it."

WEEK 5

In the light of what you have learned, write a meditation for the December edition of a church newsletter. The meditation should be entitled, "Why All this Fuss About Christmas?" and should be based upon John 1:14--"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us". (2 pages, double-spaced)

WEEK 6

You are talking to a non-Christian friend of yours to whom you have been trying to witness about the Christian faith. She/he says to you, "I can't understand why you Christians make such a big deal about the cross. It bothers me that your religion centers around someone's gruesome, bloody, violent death. I don't understand why that had to happen. And I know I'm not perfect, but have I done something so bad that someone had to shed his blood for me? That's what you Christians say, but it doesn't make sense." In seeking to convey the significance of the cross, how would you respond to your friend? (2 pages, double-spaced).

WEEK 7

In the light of what you have learned, prepare an Affirmation of Faith (about the length of the Apostles' Creed) to be printed in the bulletin and used in a worship service on Pentecost Sunday entitled "I Believe in the Holy Spirit." Let your affirmation focus entirely on the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

WEEK 8

In the light of what you have learned, write a 500 word (2 pages, double-spaced) meditation based upon 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24: "May the God of peace himself entirely sanctify you; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it."

Work with this text in its context, and be sure to explain (1) what "entirely sanctified" means (the extent of sanctification possible in this life); and (2) how a person is wholly sanctified.

WEEK 9

Harold, an older member of your congregation who had a dynamic witness for Christ has been dead for about a year. Now Martha, his wife, is sitting in your office and asking you some questions. "I know I'm going to be reunited with Harold someday," she says, "But tell me, where is Harold now? Is he in heaven with all the saints, alone with Jesus, or in some sort of purgatory? Is he conscious or sleeping? And what kind of body does he have, anyway? I hope I'm not being overly inquisitive, but it would be comforting to me to know." What would you say to Martha? (2 pp. double-spaced).

Write down what you would say to John and Mary? (2 pages double-spaced).

REQUIRED TEXTS

Justo L. Gonzalez, *An Introduction to Christian Theology*

John Lawson, *Introduction to Christian Doctrine*

Other various selections

The Course Center: The Course Center will contain a copy of the final official syllabus for our class as well as all our class modules.

The Discussion Center: The Discussion Center will be used for all group communications. Anytime you have a question or comment about the course, the modules, assignments, or anything else of interest to all of us you should post it to the Discussion Center.

The DO670XL Office: The DO501XL Office is for private correspondence between you and me. Items you do not want to appear before your fellow participants or items you think may embarrass me need to be posted here.

The Archives Center: The Archive Center will be used for storing correspondence that has already been explored during the semester in the Discussion Center. This will be done after the completion of each module and at my discretion.

The Chat Center: The Chat Center is intended primarily for real-time interaction among participants. You can meet with other members to study, ask questions, or explore topics. None of the conversations in this location are ever saved.

The Resource Center: The Resource Center provides access to a number of specific tools available to all ExL participants. These include access to Asbury Theological Seminary's B. L. Fisher Library, the services in Estes Chapel, ExL Updates, Guidelines for Success, Helpful Hints, Interesting Links, a PowerPoint Viewer, and a Real Audio player.

When you have questions about the technical and logistical aspects of this course, please consult a staff member on the campus of Asbury Theological Seminary. These staff members are unfailingly helpful, and I urge you to contact any of them if you need assistance. Here are some of the key personal and locations.

(1) The ExL Program at Asbury Theological Seminary

Kevin Osborn at exl_director@asburyseminary.edu

or

Amy Jo Adams at exl_coach@asburyseminary.edu

(2) Technical Support (for computer and software support):

Andy Adams at exl_support@asburyseminary.edu

(3) General and Reference Library Assistance:

Hannah Kirsch at Hannah_Kirsch@asburyseminary.edu

(4) Inter-Library Loan Assistance:

Dorothy James at Dot_James@asburyseminary.edu

